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## RELATIVE FUNCTION IN SPACE OF DISCOURSE IN INTERACTION

*Małgorzata Kita*

*Dialogue, communication, discourse, interaction, conversation*, as well as a *neologism communiversion* (which appeared on the cover of *DRLAV. Revue de linguistique* of 1983) are the words — from the category of internationalisms — naming the phenomena, in which linguistics became interested only recently.

The structuralist tradition used to give primacy to the interest of language system — abstract and decontextualized one, however in the work by de Saussure, fundamental for this theoretical-ideological-methodological orientation, one may observe a perception of social nature of language (as well as — what is important for an issue interesting for us — a rank of oral form of language existence). Only the intellectual climate of the end of the 60s of the last century in the United States — appearance and development of pragmatic linguistics and sociolinguistics, or these linguistic domains, which may be defined as integrationalist — directed linguistics to speaking, operating language, communicating in a situation. Such a way of understanding and practising linguistics quickly reached Europe, reached Poland. Its motto could be Roman Jakobson's point of view expressed just in 1952: "Je pense que la réalité fondamentale á laquelle le linguiste a affaire, c'est l'interlocution — l'échange des messages entre émetteur et receveur, destinataire et destinataire, encodeur et decodeur" (JAKOBSON, 1963: 32).

Polish research on talk (conversation understood as a synonym of *talk*) — regarded as a prototypical form of using language in interaction<sup>1</sup> — may be

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<sup>1</sup> Compare: Conversation is clearly the prototypical kind of language use (LEVINSON, 1983: 284).

presently defined as dynamic and diverse (both thematically and methodologically). They concern structurization of dialogue, genological status, typology. Lately they also comprise a stylistic aspect (compare WITOSZ (ed.), 2006).

Making a talk a basic research subject encourages to initiate a functionalist train of discursive interactive practice present in a talk.

The Austin's speech act theory caused modifications in the perception of language functions from a classic expression by Roman Jakobson from 1960, which resulted in Polish linguistics and the volume discussed frequently from the series "Język a Kultura" 4: *Funkcje języka i wypowiedzi* (1991).

Interest in interactive dimension of language<sup>2</sup> gave encouragement to take up the problem of quality of the very contact, shaped linguistically. Two subjects, staying in contact, creating a text together, function in a mutual relation, they get into different types of relations. This co-operation (*interactional achievement*, in accordance with Schlegloff's notion) denotes that speakers co-ordinate their activities to create a final product together, or conversation of *sensu largo*.

In a discussion on programme article by Renata GRZEGORCZYKOWA (1991) Małgorzata Marcjanik was postulating: "I also think that it would be worth wondering about more precise hierarchization of functions and on constructing such a scheme, which would have an open character, namely it would not constitute a limited register of functions, but it would comprise empty spaces on the lowest levels of its graphic form, which could be probably completed by functions of subordinate character, for which existence we are not so sure or their existence cannot be fully confirmed by the current research results" (MARCJANIK, 1991: 32; honours — M.K.).

And this article is a voice, which pays attention to the fact that some language-communication activities are subject to relations between/among speakers. They express, define, name, construct, acquire, also destroy it, or possess not only a constructive power, but also a destructive one. They result from an obvious fact that two subjects participate in a conversation, two interlocutors, between whom a social relation is constructed/occurs. "Certain strategic activities are predestined to fulfil tasks orientated on relations between participants of communication act (e.g. a choice of communication approach, including: co-operation vs. conflict, politeness vs. impoliteness vs. lack of politeness, dominance vs. subordination; a choice of theme, a choice of kind of utterance) and tactical (e.g. a choice of type of language, language register, speech acts), as well as some categories and linguistic phenomena. Each of them may be

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<sup>2</sup> The newest definition of the essence of this trend — presently called "discourse in interaction" — is the following: "Par < discours-en-interaction > on designe le vaste ensemble des pratiques discursives qui se déroulent en contexte interactif, et dont la conversation ne représente qu'une forme particulière" (KERBRAT-ORECCHIONI, 2005: 14).

suggested/or imposed by one interactant, but respected by the other one or being the subject of conversational negotiations”<sup>3</sup>.

The relative function in discourse in interaction may occur as an only function, or it may co-occur and co-operate with some other function — as a dominant, coordinate, subsidiary one. Two functions: phatic and impressive are particularly susceptible to symbiosis. Both of them are related to a recipient.

A phatic function specializes in making, forming and maintaining a contact. An impressive function is responsible for influencing the other one. A relative function is responsible for quality of contact and for the form of interpersonal relations.

In the research on communication behaviour one tests the way in which interactants perceive, categorize and express relations occurring among them (KERBRAT-ORECCHIONI, 1994: 71). There are two axes of relation. One is constituted by a horizontal dimension — of basic parameter, which is a distance. A communication *continuum* stretches here between two poles: closeness (this what connects) and distance (this what divides, declines), treated as parameters of physical and mental nature. The other axis is constituted by a vertical dimension, connected with knowledge, dominance, or — not to use expressions evoking superiority — inequality. Both relative axes — horizontal and vertical — possess certain semiotic facts, which express, reflect, confirm, contest or constitute them.

The communication category expressing (explicitly and implicitly) the relations between participants of communication act are relationems. Their nature, obviously resulting from property of communication (its multicoding and multichanneling) is heterogenous: these are linguistic phenomena, both paralinguistic and non-linguistic.

Because there exist a horizontal and a vertical axis, there also exist horizontal and vertical relationems correspondingly (they are also called taxems<sup>4</sup>, from Greek *taxis* “place, position”).

## 1. HONORIFIC FORMS

Both axes are ‘served’ by the same linguistic category<sup>5</sup>, namely honorific forms, which allow to manage a discourse and physical space (it is not their only

<sup>3</sup> Only some of them will be discussed in this article.

<sup>4</sup> Despite convergence with this word functioning as a notion in L. Bloomfield’s theory, where it has the meaning: “single feature of grammar system” (*Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego*. 1999). Such a polysematicity of terms is not an exception in different theories, schools, linguistic methodologies.

<sup>5</sup> The thorough description of relationems is presented by KERBRAT-ORECCHIONI (1992: 9—155).

exponent). The system equivalent of closeness, familiarity is a grammar form of 2<sup>nd</sup> person sg., or *you* and corresponding verb forms, while a distance, formality is expressed by the form *Mr/Mrs* connected with a verb in 3<sup>rd</sup> person sg.

A very extended — apart from the tendencies to simplify it — Polish honorific system allows the speakers to define an identity of the allocutor thanks to honorific forms, which allow to name a profession (*Mr Prosecutor*, *Mr Editor*, *Mr Doctor*), a function (*Mr Director*), a scientific degree (*Mr Professor*), status (*Your Eminence*), etc. The indication of speaker's status in a social structure may be specific (*Mr Dean*), but it may be an approximate one. In the other case during a conversation we usually raise a speaker's status, promoting him or her somehow, e.g. *Mr Dean* in the presence of *Deputy Dean*, or *Mr Colonel* in the presence of Lieutenant Colonel. In case of Polish one may accept such an activity as a form of subordination to the rule of respecting the speaker, or it is respecting the Goffman's rule of respecting the speaker's face<sup>6</sup>.

Thanks to a honorific system and the rule of mutuality the speakers mutually signal the position of the other speakers, and indirectly his or her own position. Using a given honorific form, they explicitly inform about what they perceive and categorize/they want to perceive and categorize an allocutor — in a sending act. In reaction to a honorific form used towards oneself they confirm statutory arrangements of the other person or they verify his or her decisions in this respect (e.g. A: *Mr, please...* — B: *I am Mr Doctor for you*, or a plain formulaic reaction to premature and mutually not negotiated 'ticking': *We have not grazed pigs*). Indirectly, naming a speaker, they indicate their own position in relation to him or her, e.g. addressing a doctor *Mr Doctor*, the speaker fulfils a script of a relation: patient — doctor. Using a given honorific form results from a nature of relations (social and affective) between/among speakers. On the other hand, however, honorific decisions have a decisive (although not the only one) meaning for forming social relations, including the interactive ones.

## 2. POLITENESS VS IMPOLITENESS VS LACK OF POLITENESS

Politeness researchers — a social wonder par *excellence* — admit that in polite formulae their semantic aspect is not the most important, it becomes less significant in the face of function, it gives way to purpose: creating "a polite atmosphere", or such a surrounding or a climate, in which speakers feel well, at

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<sup>6</sup> Probably also for improving one's own status: as a person talking to, e.g. a dean, but not to his representative, although own evaluation occurs only in the world of symbolic system.

least safe. The predictability of conventional behaviour, creating a climate of safety and good mood, gives the opportunity to focus on other parties and purposes of interaction.

The opposite of politeness, conscious impolite behaviour, or inconsistent with unwritten code of behaviour, cause deterioration of relations between/among speakers. The rule of mutuality functions here (compare Mickiewicz's expression: *May violence inflict violence...*). A lack of cocoon, which a polite atmosphere constitutes, generates negative emotions.

But linguistic impoliteness may be a consequence of deterioration of relations between/among speakers. A conflict may cause a departure from neutral, official forms to exponents of aggression (e.g. in a hot atmosphere of argument an unmarked 3<sup>rd</sup> person sg. feature and *Mr/Mrs* may be replaced by a degrading 2<sup>nd</sup> person form in the speaker's intention).

It is worth concentrating in this context on two phenomena: impoliteness and a lack of impoliteness, which should not be identified. Impoliteness may be defined as a conscious communicative behaviour, which is based on using linguistic means regarded as contrary to what is perceived — based on convention — as politeness. This is the deliberate choice of what may afflict the recipient, hurt or destroy his face. *Afflict* means here miscellaneous perlocutionary effects: offence, insult, slander, etc. This is the procedure of deliberate use of FTA (*Face Threatening Acts*) in the conception of politeness worked out by BROWN and LEVINSON (1987).

I understand lack of politeness as a conscious restraint from the use of communicative means, which are required in a given situation. Thus I treat it as not using either FTA or FFA (*Face Flattering Acts*, see KERBRAT-ORECCHIONI, 2005). This is the attitude, for naming of which a suitable but non-existent (but potential) derivative with a prefix: *a-*: *apoliteness* through analogy with *amoral-ity* would be appropriate.

Giving up polite behaviour<sup>7</sup> may result from different motives. It may result from a lack of respect, unwillingness and similar negative emotions in the face of the speaker (in the face of his or her opinion, behaviour etc.). Also the belief of purely ornamental function of polite behaviour may induce the speaker to refrain from its use<sup>8</sup>. A lack of expected polite acts may cause at the recipient's of the utterance an impression that the speaker is "impolite". And here just a step for him or her to use active impoliteness.

<sup>7</sup> What is described here is the prevention from some kind of behaviour, a lack of knowledge of rules of politeness required in a given place and at some given time.

<sup>8</sup> Some examples quoted in the article: DĄBROWSKA (2006) may probably be explained by such "pragmatic", "practical" or economic approach. What results from the research on the approach of contemporary youth to language is the fact that language is treated purely instrumentally, as a "tool" for efficient, including fast achievement of the result.



### 3. A CHOICE OF LINGUISTIC VARIETY

A choice of language variety/linguistic variety has its consequences for the character of the interaction, including formulating the relations between/among the participants. Let us look at some situations.

In the conversation of native speaker of language with its foreign counterpart, when the speakers know the other language, the decision which language will mediate communication, will turn out to be significant for the form of relations between/among speakers and may be the subject of some arrangements.

I assume that making a decision results from polite motives — to pay respect and kindness towards the other person. That is why the foreigner speaks the host's language, and he or she responds in the guest's language. And here the discomfort of the foreigner occurs, who is not sure if such a reaction does not result from the fact that he acquired the language to some imperfect extent and a kind landlord wants to decrease his cognitive effort put into speaking a foreign language.

Within doctor's consultation (or a complementary relation) a doctor may use a specialized (medical) language or a standard language while addressing his or her patient. Medical language in this situation becomes a carrier of knowledge and power, authority. The status of the specialist in the contact with non-specialist puts the other person in a subordinate situation, which makes him confess a lack of knowledge, to ask questions concerning explanation by means of "human" language, to do someone a favour, to ask an expert to say this or that "in Polish", instead of his or her language. A specialized language becomes a language of dominance.

The alternative is using a standard language, or this variety, which is available for both parties. But this solution is only seemingly egalitarian, because the specialist "lowers himself/herself" to a linguistic level of the speaker. A patient also may feel underestimated by the fact that the doctor may talk to him or her so "normally", so "simply". In fact, the patient may still feel as a participant of interaction of a lower status.

Informal language — this variety, which has the biggest range of use, is "the first human language" or "language of intimacy" — it possesses a huge relative potential, which must be managed with care.

Granting a separate position in an analysis of linguistic phenomena for profanities of relative function, or for this lexical category, for which life context is constituted by informal language, results from their huge emotional potential.

One of their groups is listed in a category of apelative expressions: these are curses, or in other words — invectives. The relative nature of curses has already been described in their definition: "[...] a curse is an usually spontaneously expressed sentence, revealing the speaker's emotions concerning the addressee; it

may be used to make the recipient aware that the speaker feels something bad towards the addressee and to make him feel bad because of that" (GROCHOWSKI 1995: 18). The function of curses may be brought to the desire of creating an atmosphere of negative emotions, which is supposed to introduce the recipient to a state of discomfort and danger, make him or her create a belief of being inferior and being placed in a definitely worse situation. They construct a relation of a social, but also of an affective nature.

The attention is focused as well on such conscious and deliberate use of profanities by people of high competence and high performantive skills, who use them, and treat them as a component of communicative game with the speaker of big linguistic sensitivity. Profanities are treated here as an exponent of mental and affective intimacy of the speakers. Acquaintance with the other person, common history, worked out during their acquaintance, enable — with bilateral consent — to annul social and moral negative valorization of profanities in a mutual contact. Treated as a game — they consist of a range of private language of interactants, activated in their interactive space. The interactive history of the speakers, constructed by their common work, determines the framework of mutually accepted linguistic crudity.

The examination of relation in interaction (verbal) makes search of radical methodological opposition: determinism vs. constructivism. One cannot state whether the widely recognized communication context (including a type of relation) determines a form of interaction, or it is (also relation/relations) constructed by interaction. The solution of this dilemma is approval of compromising approach: relations between/among interactants determine their discursive activity, but also the choices made by subjects have the power to transform the relations between/among them. So: "Le contexte façonne le discours et le discours façonne le contexte en retour" (KERBRAT-ORECCHIONI, 2005: 74).

The relative function present in discourse in interaction and occurring in linguistic phenomena of miscellaneous status is listed in this indirect model: language elements, in which it is personified, result from the relations among speakers and also have power to transform the relations in discursive space.

Doing research in relative function is also a form of taking the floor in other important issue concerning questions about the identity of linguistics: a notion of relation is vital for interactive trend (including a conversational one). This notion constitutes a subject of examination from sociological and psychological point of view. Thus it is another argument in favour of integrationalist linguistics.



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